

[Click here to visit other RealCities sites](#)**BayArea.com**  
THE BAY AREA'S HOME PAGEOur Local Channels → **News** ▾ **Business** ▾ **Sports** ▾ **Entertainment** ▾ **Living** ▾ **Classifieds** ▾[Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Archives](#) | [Place an Ad](#) | [Newspaper Subscriptions](#) | [Email Dispatches](#)

Search

» [Search the Archives](#)**TODAY'S FRONT PAGE**» [Click here to view it.](#)**The Mercury News**[Front Page](#)[Nation/World](#)» [National](#)» [Politics &](#)[Government](#)[Local News](#)» [The Valley](#)» [The Peninsula & San](#)[Francisco](#)» [Alameda County](#)» [Northern California](#)» [Education](#)» [Obituaries](#)» [Science & Health](#)[Business/Technology](#)» [Drive](#)» [Personal Technology](#)» [Real Estate](#)[Sports](#)[Features](#)» [Arts &](#)[Entertainment](#)» [Books](#)» [Eye](#)» [Family & Religion](#)» [Food & Wine](#)[Back to Home](#) > [Mercury News](#) >

Wednesday, Aug 28, 2002

## The Mercury News

Select a day: [M](#) | [T](#) | [W](#) | [Th](#) | [F](#) | [S](#) | [Su](#)Posted on Wed,  
Aug. 28, 2002**The Mercury News**

### Legislators push to clean up summit **U.S. WOULD PAY TO RESTORE OLD BASE AT MOUNT UMUNHUM**

By Paul Rogers  
Mercury News

With Silicon Valley spread below on one side and Monterey Bay in the distance, U.S. Rep. Mike Honda on Tuesday stepped up efforts to win federal funding for a long-stalled toxics cleanup at an abandoned Air Force base on the summit of one of Santa Clara County's landmark mountain peaks.

“This will be a great education spot,” said Honda, D-San Jose, at a news conference atop Mount Umunhum, located on San Jose's southern edge. “It will also offer people a reprieve from cell phones and computers. This is a great place to slow down.”

Named for the Ohlone Indian word for hummingbird, the 3,486-foot peak towers above South San Jose and Los Gatos on the chaparral ridges between Lexington Reservoir and Almaden Quicksilver County Park.

Despite thousands of acres of public parkland on its slopes, most Silicon Valley residents know “Mount Um” only for the abandoned Air Force radar building that looks like a sugar cube on its summit. The Air Force closed the Almaden Air Force Station in the early 1980s and sold the peak in 1986 to a government parks agency, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.

Since the late 1970s, the open space district, based in Los Altos and funded by property taxes, has been buying land across the mountain. It now owns more than 15,000 acres, open for hiking, biking and horse riding.



Rick E. Martin--Mercury News

U.S. Rep. Mike Honda climbs a tower atop Mount Umunhum. He wants the U.S. Senate to make the peak cleanup a priority.

[Shopping/Services](#)**Find a Job:**

Look who's hiring

**careerbuilder****Find a Car:**

Buy, Sell, Trade

**cars.com****Find a Home:**

Agents and more

**Real Estate**  
CHANNEL**Find an Apartment:**

Rental Listings

**apartments.com...****Classifieds:**Search our online  
[Newspaper Classifieds](#)**Shop Nearby:**Your online source for  
[Local Shopping](#)**PHOTOS OF THE DAY**» [more photos](#)

[» Home & Garden](#)
[» TV](#)
[» Travel](#)
[Opinion](#)
[Perspective](#)
[Columnists](#)
[Special Reports](#)

### Advertise in the Newspaper of Silicon Valley.

Advertise in the Newspaper of Silicon Valley.

[» More ad information](#)

### Reach more local buyers

Place a classified ad in the Mercury News today!

[» Mercury News Classifieds](#)

But the Air Force base site has sat like a ghost town, off limits to the public because it contains crumbling buildings and Quonset huts contaminated with asbestos, lead paint and solvents.

Honda and other South Bay leaders say the mountain could one day become a South Bay version of Marin County's Mount Tamalpais -- a sanctuary for wildlife with miles of trails.

But the peak's signature attribute, its summit, with stunning views of the Santa Clara Valley, San Francisco Bay and Monterey Bay, will remain closed until somebody cleans up the toxics and demolishes more than 50 condemned building.

Honda called on the U.S. Senate to include language in the 2003 defense spending bill next month that would finish cleanup work on top of the mountain. In June, he inserted language into the House version of the defense bill, calling for the Army Corps of Engineers to give priority to Mount Umunhum among the \$212 million allotted for military base cleanups next year.

The total cleanup is estimated to cost \$6 million for the Mount Umunhum summit, said Craig Britton, general manager of the open space district. That would include demolishing the buildings and removing the toxics.

San Jose City Councilwoman Pat Dando said Tuesday that she used to tell her three children in the 1970s during wintertime that twinkling lights on the mountain top were from Santa Claus. Dando attempted to drive to the summit in 1975 with her husband, Bob, and their children for a picnic, but was turned away at the Air Force gate.

Now, she said, Mount Umunhum should join Mount Hamilton, Mount Diablo and Mount Tamalpais among the great Bay Area mountain parks.

``There is wildlife here, from golden eagles to mountain lions to steelhead," Dando said. ``As we live hustle-bustle lives, it is nice to have these types of places to come to.

``What a legacy to leave our children and grandchildren," she said. ``If we don't do it, then who will?"

For years, the district has not made the cleanup a top priority as it acquired land for parks on the ridges from Los Gatos to Burlingame. And it has been rebuffed by Army Corps of Engineers officials, who removed underground fuel tanks and old transformers, but balked at helping with the asbestos and lead paint.

On Tuesday, a spokesman for U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., said the senator, a member of the conference committee that will hammer out the defense budget, will push to include language in the final bill that would make Mount Umunhum a federal cleanup priority.

``When the Army Corps is doling out money, this should go to the top of the list," said Feinstein spokesman Scott Gerber. ``It is important for California and the Bay Area."

From 1957 to 1980, more than 120 Air Force employees lived at the summit's Almaden Air Force Station, scanning the coast for a Soviet attack.

One former resident recalled the adventures of living on a remote mountaintop.

``It was small-town America with great views," said Jack Smith, 45, of Cambria.

### Stocks

Enter symbol/company name

Smith lived at the summit in 1971 and 1972 when he was 14 years old. His father was an Air Force medic. He recalled 25-cent movies on Friday nights at the base gymnasium, knee-deep snow drifts in the winter, and the one bus a day that took him down to Leigh High School and back.

``Making the top a park is a wonderful idea," he said. ``There's a fabulous view, and great opportunities for cycling, hiking and horse riding."

To find out more about the Friends of Mount Umunhum, a new group that is advocating for public access, call Elaina Cuzick at the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District at (650) 691-1200, extension 511.

Contact Paul Rogers at [progers@sjmercury.com](mailto:progers@sjmercury.com) or (408) 920-5045.



[email this](#)



[print this](#)

#### RELATED LINKS

- » [Today's Front Page](#)
- » [Today's Sports Section](#)
- » [Today's Business Section](#)
- » [This morning's weather](#)
- » [This morning's commute](#)

[News](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Living](#) | [Classifieds](#)

[Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Archives](#) | [Place an Ad](#) | [Newspaper Subscriptions](#) | [Email Dispatches](#)

[About BayArea.com](#) | [About Realcities Network](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Press Center](#) | [Copyright](#)

[Breaking News](#)

[Columnists](#)

[Local](#)

[Nation](#)

[Politics](#)

[Transportation](#)

[Weather](#)

[Weird News](#)

[World](#)

[Columnists](#)

[Companies](#)

[Financial Markets](#)

[Industries](#)

[People & Events](#)

[Personal Finance](#)

[Regional Indicators](#)

[Technology](#)

[Baseball](#)

[Basketball](#)

[Colleges](#)

[Columnists](#)

[Football](#)

[Golf](#)

[Hockey](#)

[Motorsports](#)

[Other Sports](#)

[Soccer](#)

[Women](#)

[Celebrities](#)

[Columnists](#)

[Comics & Games](#)

[Dining](#)

[Events](#)

[Horoscopes](#)

[Movies](#)

[Music](#)

[Nightlife](#)

[Performing Arts](#)

[Television](#)

[Visitors Guide](#)

[Visual Arts](#)

[Columnists](#)

[Community](#)

[Education](#)

[Food](#)

[Health](#)

[Home](#)

[Occasions](#)

[Travel](#)

[Automotive](#)

[Employment](#)

[Personals](#)

[Real Estate](#)